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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Under-Secretary-General Martti Ahtisaari stresses importance of fuel and power in extension of urgent humanitarian relief to Iraq.

- Security Council's Sanctions Committee decides to lift embargo on civilian and humanitarian imports to Iraq.

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to participate in voluntary return of South African refugees and political exiles.

- United States announces $5 million special contribution to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

- Preliminary mission to assess human rights conditions in El Salvador concludes work.

- United Nations Development Programme approves $4 million Gulf crisis programme.

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Briefing correspondents today at Headquarters on the situation in Iraq, Under-Secretary-General Martti Ahtisaari said most important for the urgently needed humanitarian relief to the country was fuel and power.

He emphasized that without energy to drive generators, pumps and all kinds of mechanisms that any industrialized society depends upon, the relief effort would not provide for the urgent needs that now existed.

Mr. Ahtisaari presented his report to the Security Council yesterday and Council members were discussing it this afternoon.

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The Security Council's Sanctions Committee has decided to lift the embargo on civilian and humanitarian imports to Iraq. The Committee made its decision this afternoon on the basis of Mr. Ahtisaari's report.

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For information media—not an official record

The Committee said, in a statement, that circumstances had arisen in which there was an urgent humanitarian need to supply foodstuffs to Iraq in order to relieve human suffering. It said it would report promptly to the Council on its decision.

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The Government of South Africa has agreed, in principle, for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to participate in the voluntary return of South African refugees and exiles.

South Africa's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva yesterday informed the High Commissioner, Sadako Ogata, about her country's decision.

Mrs. Ogata told the press yesterday that she welcomed the "important" development, which, she said, would allow UNHCR to play fully its normal and traditional humanitarian role in ensuring that refugees and exiles could return under safe conditions. She said her Office was prepared to establish an adequate and effective presence in South Africa to discharge its responsibilities.

The UNHCR had earlier submitted to the South African Government a draft memorandum on the principles and modalities for the repatriation exercise. The process now hinges on the acceptance by both parties of a mutually acceptable agreement.

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The United States Government has announced a special contribution of $5 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The funds are earmarked for the Agency's emergency programmes for Palestine refugees in the Israeli-occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

An official statement issued in Washington, D.C., said that President George Bush had authorized the use of this amount from the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance Fund "to meet the unexpected urgent needs of refugees in the occupied territories".

The United States is the largest single-country donor to UNRWA's voluntarily funded education, health, relief and social programmes for some 2.4 million Palestine refugees. The country pledged $62 million to UNRWA's regular programmes for this year, in addition to a contribution of $4 million last year to help fund emergency measures.

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The preliminary mission which went to El Salvador on 13 March with the task of assessing the conditions prevailing in the country concluded its work today.

On its return to New York, the mission will present recommendations to the Secretary-General with respect to the establishment of a mission in El Salvador to verify the Agreement on Human Rights signed in San Jose, Costa Rica, on 26 July 1990, between the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN).

During the 10 days spent in El Salvador, the mission met with members of the Government, the armed forces, political parties, religious institutions and non-governmental organizations. In addition, field trips were carried out in order to make a preliminary assessment of conditions in the conflict areas of Chalatenango, Morazan, Guazapa and Usulutan, where the mission met representatives of the FMLN.

The preparatory team was headed by Iqbal Riza, Director in the Office of the Secretary-General, with the assistance of Ricardo Vigil, Chief of the Preparatory Office in San Salvador.

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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) yesterday approved a Special Programme of up to $4 million to help identify and meet the urgent relief, rehabilitation and development needs of the countries affected by the Gulf crisis.

The Programme will respond to five major areas of need, including immediate humanitarian needs, primarily emergency relief in Kuwait and Iraq; immediate and medium-term human needs, especially the socio-economic reintegration of returnees; rehabilitation of institutions and infrastructure, particularly in Kuwait and Iraq; economic management, where necessary, to rechart socio-economic strategies; and environmental recovery.

For other affected countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Eastern and Central Europe, Programme funds will be used to assist Governments to assess the impact of the Gulf crisis and to launch plans of action in critical areas, drawing on the expertise of the United Nations system.

The main challenge, according to UNDP Administrator, William H. Draper III, was to link the issues of peace, security and development in the post-war period, and, by so doing, "heal the wounds of war".

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